

PART 2 - Family and Child Activities

If you have children at home, even very little or large stubborn ones haha, it is never too early or too late to get them involved in family Lent activities. I think the key here is not trying to do too much, but also not to miss this opportunity to really mark this time as different. We have just come out of Christmas, a very obvious season to make tangibly present for everyone; there are decorations, smells, events, and so on, that set it apart. This is fitting since we are soul AND body; God reaches us through the tangible elements of the sacraments. Try to approach this time in a sacramental mindset - what “smells and bells” can you employ to really make this time stand out as different? How can you mark the time? How can you involve them so they own it? What is your focus as a family for Lent? These are the questions I asked when trying to pull together some resources and ideas for our family and all of you.

Lent is a penitential journey, and it's important to mark when it begins, so I highly recommend attending an Ash Wednesday Mass, if you can. If you can't, watch one online and make your own ashes to mark on your forehead and talk about what they signify. **Just a heads up, if you attend a Mass in person, ashes will be sprinkled on the top of the head this year as they do in some Eastern Rite churches.**

“Undecorate” for Lent. We just came out of a big decoration fest, make a point to put away knickknacks, don't put out the spring decorations yet, keep it plain. This is a time of reparation and mortification for our sins, and while we shouldn't look dreary, it still helps to have a visual cue for this time. I like to put out holy objects such as icons or rosaries in prominent places. I also bought a bunch of cheap but pretty purple satin wide ribbon a couple years ago and I drape it in different parts of the house and on our crucifixes etc through Lent. This is a great and inexpensive way to bring our senses into the season.

“Road maps” for the journey:

1. Catholic Sprouts has 2 resources this year for their Jesus Tree, the first one that follows the Gospel of Matthew and then the new one that follows the Gospel of John. This year's new version with the Gospel of John has an optional sticker and poster board set that might save you some cutting and pasting time this year.

<https://shop.catholicsprouts.com/collections/jesus-tree>

2. If you have littles who like to color and are also fond of asking “how many days until...”, then this FREE Lenten calendar is for you.

<https://www.catholicicing.com/printable-lenten-calendar-for-kids/>

3. Preparing for Mass can go a long way towards engaging kids at Church and opening them up to wonder. Lent is a great time to not only return to Mass, but to refocus the family's attention on it with these great and free weekly resources from Holy Heroes:

<https://www.holyheroes.com/MassPrep-s/57.htm>

4. These are great Lent and Easter Calendars as well, they come in a 5 pack so if anyone wants to split some (or get one for each child in your family), let me know!

<https://www.holyheroes.com/Lent-Easter-Season-Calendar-p/la-calendar-5.htm>

Prayer and Activities:

Emphasis on increased prayer during Lent, in my humble opinion, should be number one for all of us both as individuals and as families. If you are not in the habit of praying together, make a plan and make it happen, as they say. Whether it's saying a daily Rosary or a (shorter) Divine Mercy Chaplet, or breaking out the Bible and doing some family Lectio Divina, schedule out this time and make a commitment. Kids learn to pray by seeing us pray and by being given the opportunities to pray that we set aside for them. Have older kids? Invite them in on the planning part of making this happen and they will feel more ownership in the process. Here are some resources to aid in this time:

1. Make a **prayer intention jar** and have everyone write or make suggestions what goes in it. Every day draw something out of the jar and pray about it together. Bonus, for a visual, write the intentions on strips of paper and make a **Lenten chain** that you place prominently in the home. You will get to see all the ways you prayed for people during Lent. Then during Easter, read those intentions and thank God for any answered prayers you saw.

2. Make your **prayer space a sacred space**. My kids LOVE when we dim the room and light candles, they almost fight over who gets to turn off the lights or who gets to carry the light in procession. It helps us all calm down and shows a shift from the rest of our day. Create a **prayerful ambience** and it does wonders for your prayer time. You can use left over Advent **candles** or get some special **votives** for the season. This time leading up to Lent would be a great time to make prayer candles too! (I have left over beeswax sheets if you want some, let me know.) If you have an **incense** burner or even an **oil diffuser**, create a scent for your prayer time. Remember that body and soul connection, engage all the senses in a special time and it will help lift the soul and mind as well.

3. Make a **“giving it up” family chart** and write down at least some of the things each person is giving up for Lent. Talk about why and how giving a certain thing up will help you move towards Jesus and away from sin. This is a great way to introduce the virtues and vices too and contrast them; example - Mom is giving up TV because it can be a temptation to the vice of sloth and distraction, Mom wants to grow in the virtue of diligence. Don't be afraid to start this Lenten practice young, it's amazing how proud the little ones are of giving something up and sticking to it. They get it. If you have older kids, don't be afraid to have a frank discussion and challenge each other, be the leader in this though and ask your kids what THEY think YOU should give up for Lent. Hopefully they will let you reciprocate, but make sure it doesn't turn into a criticism fest.

4. Focus on sacrifice and charity for others. This is probably one of the places where we all struggle as a family, especially between siblings. We implemented the **“sacrifice” bean jar** a few years ago and each family member is allowed to drop a dry black bean into the jar when they make a sacrifice or do something out of love for someone else. At Easter these turn into jelly beans over night because love and sacrifice are sweet acts of mercy. ;) I have also seen this done with finger prints on a cross:

<https://i.pinimg.com/1200x/ff/71/45/ff71454f8fc6715750093e9e93a4482b.jpg>

5. **Catholic Icing Lent activities:** <https://www.catholicicing.com/lenten-activities-for-children/>

6. **Holy Heroes Lent Resources:** <https://www.holyheroes.com/Lenten-Resources-s/85.htm>

7. **K-12 Ideas for Kid's activities from Loyola Press:**

<https://www.loyolapress.com/catholic-resources/liturgical-year/lent/activities-and-resources/lenten-activities-for-children>

Fasting and Abstinence with family:

I already touched on this above, but hopefully you can find creative ways of involving the whole family in this beyond just giving up chocolate. (Ok, for some of us that struggle is real, but you know what I mean.) Fasting is one of those things no one wants to do (unless it's intermittent so we get trim haha, am I right?) But, it's one of those things that seemingly every Saint has mentioned, and spoiler alert it's required on certain days and Jesus did it too so we can't just ignore it. Now, if you are a mean hungry person, maybe fasting from social media might be a better choice for you haha, but, I think we can all find room to fast in our lives, and it is an unparalleled ancient prayer tool. So how do you fast with kids? Don't expect real littles to fast, but show them how and why. Go beyond no meat on Friday and consider a real (not dressed up with salsa and cheese) rice and beans dinner. Talk about the poor, and donate the pantry items

you usually would have prepared. Explain how hunger for God is like hunger for food, except God is what sustains us for eternity while tacos and peanut butter fade away.